

The Origin of Popess Joan Legend

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The Cross-dressing in Religions

Reports of women who dress as men in order to achieve exclusive male roles are told from antiquity in mythology, literature, history, theater and, more recently, in film and television. The stories have always been attractive, so that they capture the public's interest even today. It seems that the first mythological account was that of *Agnodike* (Ἀγνοδίκη), a Greek girl of the fourth century B.C.E., who dressed as a man to study medicine and then exercised the medical profession, then practiced exclusively by the men of Athens.¹

The *Virāta Parva* (Fourth Section) of the epic *Mahābhārata* (महाभारत) tells the story of the exile of the fearsome hero *Arjuna* (अर्जुन) at the court of King *Virāta*, disguised as a woman and playing the role of music and dance master, with the name of *Brhannala* (बृहन्नल).² When the commander *Uttarakumāra* was advised to recruit

¹ In the drama *Yentl* (1983), the actress Barbra Streisand plays the role of a young man who transforms himself into a man in order to study in a Jewish school (*yeshiva*) exclusively for men. The film was based on the homonymous play by Isaac B. Singer and Leah Napolin, 1975.

² *Arjuna* and his brothers (the *Pāndavas*) had to remain in exile for twelve years in the woods, and another year hidden without being identified, in fulfillment of an agreement, after defeat in a dice game (Pardilla, 1986: vol. I, 275s). Therefore, it was with the disguise of *Brhannala* that *Arjuna* spent the 13th year hidden.

Brhannala (Arjuna) as a charioteer of his chariot, in order to defend himself from an imminent attack by an enemy army, he exclaimed in surprise: "*Brhannala* is neither male nor female. How, I who am a pure *Kshatriya* (warrior caste), can I have a woman as driver of my car? I do not think it is correct. It would be beneath my dignity to have a woman in charge of the reins of my horses ... "In a further passage, a princess brought to *Brhannala (Arjuna)* a dress as bright as the sun "(Pardilla, 1986: vol 1, 459-60). These are examples of the fact that the brave and fearsome *Arjuna* warrior, in fact, acted as a woman. At the end of the battle, *Brhannala* destroyed the army of the *Kurus*, and then his identity as the brave and invincible *Arjuna* was revealed.

Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī, Buddha's aunt and mother of milk, in order to be accepted as the first nun in the order (sangha), dressed as a monk by shaving her hair, she wore the yellow tunic, barefoot and her body covered with dust, like the Buddhist monks, begged three times to be accepted (Warren, 1995: 442). The Old Testament prohibits cross-dressing: "A woman should not wear a male costume, nor should a man wear a woman's clothing; for whoever does such thing is offending the Lord his God" (Deuteronomy 22.05 - NRSV).

In history, the best-known cases of women who pass as men are in times of war. The best-known example is Joan of Arc. In Brazil, Maria Quitéria de Jesus Medeiros (1792-1853 C.E.) became well known; she entered the Brazilian army in the form of a man, went on to the

rank of lieutenant and fought in the war against the Portuguese in Bahia in the years 1822-3 C.E.

Cross-dressing is not the same as transsexuality. It is the act of dressing someone or himself to look like another sex or other condition or other age. A man who dresses as a woman, a child who dresses as an adult, a woman who dresses as a man, a young woman who dresses as an old woman, an executive who dresses as a countryman, and a virgin who dresses as a pregnant woman are all examples of cross-dressings. Therefore, cross-dressing does not just happen from one sex to another. It can be from one age to another or from one condition to another. So that, transsexuality is the biological change of sex, then a cross-dressed person is not a transvestite who has changed his biological sexuality. In addition, the issues of cross-dressing identity and goal make the differences.

The legend of popess Joan³ is the curious account of a young woman who has gone a long way in his career. She was secretary to the curia, cardinal, and then held the throne of the most powerful institution in Europe at the time, the Catholic Church, for more than two years.

Textual Manipulation in the Past

At a time when the means of communicating directly with the masses did not exist, such as today's newspapers, magazines,

³ Although the name Joan was the most used, the popess was also called Gilberta, Agnes, Margaret, Isabel, Dorothy and Jutta by several authors (Döllinger, 1872: 41n).

radio, television, internet, etc., as well as almost all population was illiterate, the most effective means of controlling public opinion was through the manipulation of influential texts. In a predominantly religious society, it meant changing religious books. Thus, the few literate were the makers of opinions, as well as the intermediaries between culture and the illiterate population. Therefore, the manipulation strategy worked like that. When the manipulators wanted a text to be understood according to the interpretation they held, the manuscripts were altered by the copyists, or omitted the inconvenient sections, according to the determination of the manipulators. So that when the literates read them, they would then transmit ideas manipulated, according to the intention of the manipulators of texts, to the illiterate, through speeches, sermons, preaching, public readings, etc. In this way, the ideas manipulated reached the immense population illiterate.

The work of recovery and restoration of these manipulated texts to their original form or, at least, as close as possible to the original is now called Textual Criticism.

So when we know that a text has been greatly altered or omitted in its parts during the process of transcription and its unrecoverable originality due to the scarcity of texts in the manuscript lineage, it is difficult for historians to determine with certainty the historicity of facts narrated in its content. For we are aware of official records that some texts in the past have been manipulated or mutilated. For example, in the case of the Talmud, an important book of Rabbinic Judaism, we have abundant medieval records of

the ostensible campaign of the Catholic Church to eliminate humiliating mentions of Jesus and Christianity in their text through papal bulls and edicts, as well as through of episcopal decrees of the Middle Ages. Now, when we do not have documentation registering the textual manipulations or, even worse, if it is not possible to trace the manipulations through the handwritten lineage, the determination if the text was altered or not, becomes impossible. This case happens to the documentation set of popess Joana.

The main problem to solve if the account of popess Joan is legend or fact is in the division between those who claim that the story is a legend (the great majority of researchers from the nineteenth century: Döllinger, 1872; Kelly, 1988; Pardoe, 1988; Boureau, 2001; Rustici, 2006 and Noble, 2013). Because her papacy does not fit at any interval in papal history, according to the dates mentioned in the narratives, since the records are well-documented (Medieval Chronicles) and well-reasoned, thus leaving no room for the pontificate of a popess at any time. While those who claim that the account of Joan is a historical fact (a small minority of recent authors: Morris, 1985 and Stanford, 1999). That is to say, she really existed and occupied the papal throne, because they cannot base on records (chronicles) and on surviving documents, maintain that these documents were manipulated and mutilated through a campaign of the Church in order to eliminate all the mentions on popess Joan in Medieval Chronicles, soon after its papacy. However, there is no record of this file-burning campaign, also it is difficult to track the process of

eliminating the mentions of popess Joan in surviving manuscripts, so that most of the current researchers, occupied with this subject, are of the opinion that popess Joan was a medieval legend.

Because there have been so many manipulations of texts in the past, especially in a time of strong ideological interests and a dispute for power within the Church, as happened in the Middle Ages, even though they did not have the records, and the handwritten evidence necessary to prove the omissions and the alterations, the conviction of many that popess Joan was a legend, cannot be assured as a complete confirmation, since the possibility of manipulation in the manuscripts is still a question to be considered.

Another problem for absolute reliance on surviving written records is orality, that is, how much the oral tradition about the papacy had historicity or was full of rumors. In addition, how much of these narratives was included and how much was left out in the first chronicles of the thirteenth century, and the so much that was added, altered and omitted in later records. For, we know that in the Middle Ages many stories were preserved through oral transmission, since many were illiterate. In order to have an idea of how much the legend has increased over the years, compared to the first records of the thirteenth century: Jean of Mailly, Etienne of Bourboun, Dominic of Erfurt and Martinus Polonus, it is enough to observe that the reports of these authors did not exceed the length of a paragraph, while the most widely read papal novel today, *Pope Joan, to Novel*, by Donna Woolfolk Cross, exceeds five hundred pages.

Finally, based on papal records and documents (Papal Chronicles), the most logical conclusion is that popess Joan really was a legend, but the question is, if it is discovered that these documents (chronicles) were manipulated, then the foundations of the edifice upon which present-day historians have constructed their conclusions will crumble, leading the edification to collapse. Therefore, this is what we are going to report and discuss next.

The First Records

Despite some doubts, historians point to the *Chronica Universalis Mettensis* (Universal Chronicles of Metz); written by the Dominican priest Jean of Mailly, in Latin and published around 1250 C.E., as the first report about a popess, though not mention her name. The content of the text is as follows: "It is required (confirmation), about a certain pope, or rather a popess, since he was a woman. Pretending to be a man, he was made secretary of the curia, by virtue of the righteousness of his character, then cardinal and finally pope. One day, when he had ridden on a horse, he gave birth to a child and immediately, through the Roman courts, he had his feet tied, he was pulled by the horse's tail and was stoned by the people for half a league, and where he died, he was buried, and there it is written: *Petre, Pater Patrum, Papisse Prodito Partum* (Peter, Father of the Fathers, Publish the Popess Childbearing). Then it was created the Fast of the Four Times, called the Fast of the Popess "(Noble, 2013: 219, Latin text: 219n2).

In order to convey a more coherent sense, some authors translated this text through the female pronoun "she", instead of the pronoun "he" (Stanford, 1999: 17 and Rustici, 2006: 04), in order to, for example, to disguise the strangeness of the phrase "he gave birth to a child" (*peperit puerum*). However, the Latin text mentions all the pronouns in the masculine gender through the verbs in the past masculine participle: he was "made" (*factus*), he was "dragged" (*tractus*), he was "stoned" (*lapidātus*) and he was "buried" (*sepultus*), so I preferred the English translation of Thomas F.X. Noble (2013: 219), which faithfully translates the Latin text.⁴

The author Jean of Mailly seemed to express doubts about the historicity of the popess in writing this text in 1250 c.e., by initiating it with the verb "*require*", perhaps in the sense of "more research required",⁵ he also seemed unsure in

⁴ To agree with the pronoun in the feminine gender, the Latin verbs would also have to be in the feminine: *facta* (made), *tracta* (dragged), *lapidāta* (stoned) and *sepulta* (buried). In the allusion to popess Joan, Craig M. Rustici included the phrase "which is not on the list of the bishops of Rome" in his translation of excerpts from *Chronica Universalis Mettensis* by Jean of Mailly, but this phrase is not included in Latin text published by Thomas F. X. Noble (page 219n2).

⁵ Thomas F. X. Noble reported that the opening word of the text "*require*" appears in the autograph manuscript of Jean of Mailly (Noble, 2013: 219). Peter Stanford, who believed in the historicity of popess Joan, ignored this verb and began translating it with the phrase: "It is known about a certain pope ..." (Stanford, 1999: 17).

putting all the pronouns in the masculine (he), instead of the feminine "she", when referring to the popess. In addition, the name of the popess is not mentioned, nor the date of his pontificate and its native land, as they appear in subsequent chronicles.

A few years later (1265 C.E.), an anonymous author, who became known as "The Franciscan of Erfurt", wrote the *Chronica Minor*, where the popess is also mentioned. He drew inspiration from Jean of Mailly's narrative and added further details: "There was another false pope, whose name and age are not known. For she was a woman, as it is recognized by the Romans, of refined appearance, of great knowledge and hypocritically of high conduct. She disguised herself in men's clothing and was elected to papacy. As a popess, she became pregnant, and when she was pregnant, a demon publicly announced the fact to everyone in the public square shouting this verse: '*Papa, Pater Patrum, Papisse Prodito Partum* (Pope, Father of the Fathers, Publish the Popess Childbearing)" (Stanford, 1999: 28).

The narrative of the *Chronica Minor* coincides in some points with that of Jean of Mailly, whereas it diverges in others. Note that the name and age of the popess are unknown; she disguised herself in men's clothing, possessed great knowledge and was elected pope, as in *Chronica Universalis* account. However, instead of giving birth in public, after dragged and stoned to death, and also buried in the place of death, in *Chronica Minor* the secret of pregnancy is revealed by a demon in a public square. Note also that the

first word in the sentence with the six "P's" in *Chronica Universalis* is "Petre" (Peter), while in *Chronica Minor* is "Papa" (Pope). In addition, the sentence with six "P"s in the first narrative is engraved in the grave, while in the second it was a phrase spoken by a devil.

At about the same time, a treatise written by an inquisitor and Dominican priest, Etienne of Bourdon, known as *Tractatus of Diversis Materiis Praedicabilibus* (Treatise on Various Materials for Preaching), published around 1260 C.E., echoed Jean of Mailly's narrative, at the same time adding some details, such as the date of the pontificate of the popess, but in a more reproachful sense: "An impressive blow of audacity, or rather insanity, happened around the year 1100, as it is said in the chronicles. A certain educated woman, educated in the art of writing, taking on masculine clothes and presenting herself as a man, came to Rome and, having been accepted, both by her energy and her knowledge, was made secretary of the curia, then with the aid of the devil, was made cardinal and then pope. She became pregnant and gave birth when she rode a horse and was dragged out of the city; she was stoned by the people for a league. She was buried where she died and on the stone placed on her corpse, this little verse was written: '*Parce Pater Patrum Papisse Prodere Partum* (Avoid, Father of the Fathers, Publishing Popess Childbearing)". See what abhorrent end such bold presumption leads" (Noble, 2013: 219, Latin text: 219n3).

Observe that the narrative of Etienne of Bourdon coincides in some points and diverges in others Jean of Mailly's, as well as adds more

details. The initial word in the alliteration of the six "P's" is now "*Parce*", from the verb "*parcere*," which means to abstain from, to save and to avoid. Note also that, unlike Jean of Mailly's, the pronouns and verbs are in the feminine gender. He included a date for the pontificate, 1100 C.E. The phrase "as it is said in the chronicles" (*ut dicitur in chronicis*) is object of discussion among the researchers, to know which chronicles would be. For some writers claim that there were more references to popess before Etienne of Bourdon's *Tractatus* and *Chronica Universalis* and *Chronica Minor*, but the church destroyed them through a campaign to extinguish the existence of the popess Joan of history.

The discussion revolves around the suspicion that the popess is mentioned by authors prior to Jean of Mailly (13th century), i.e., authors of the eleventh, twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, such as Marianus Scotus (1028-82 C.E.), Sigebert of Gembloux (1035-1112 C.E.), Otto of Freising (1111-58 C.E.), Godfrey of Viterbo (1120-96 C.E.) and Gervase of Tilbury (1150-1221 C.E.). However, in each case the reference to popess is absent in the oldest extant manuscripts of these authors, that is, the reference to popess appears only in the later manuscripts, which led some researchers to the conclusion that these late references to the popess are interpolations after 1250 C.E., when policing had been relaxed and the historicity of the popess had become credible by many within the Church. On the other hand, the authors who believe in the historicity of the popess claim that the absence of reference to the popess in earliest manuscripts of these authors by first

copyists of the autograph manuscripts is due to the campaign to eliminate her from history, and when the campaign relaxed, the copyists of the later manuscripts were not forced to omit the popes any more, since its history was almost universally accepted. Alternatively, that the later copies have escaped censorship of the Church, so the references appear (see Rustici, 2006: 08 and Noble, 2013: 219).

Curious is the fact that of all surviving manuscripts of Godfrey's work *Pantheon* of Viterbo, written in 1190 C.E., only in one appears the phrase "popess Joan is not enumerated". Then, the author Joan Morris, who defended the historicity of the popess, justified that this single manuscript escaped the censorship of the Church, a fact that shows the rigor by which policing was conducted (Rustici, 2006: 08 and Noble, 2013: 219).

The solution to this doubt seems still distant, although the hypothesis that the references to the popess in late manuscripts are interpolations has more force among the historians today.

Finally, among all the early narratives on the popess, the most influential that would later become the source of inspiration for all subsequent writers who wrote on the subject was the *Chronicon Pontificum et Imperatorum* (Chronicle of Popes and Emperors), written by the Dominican priest Martinus Polonus (Martin Strebski), deceased in 1278 C.E., and according to most historians, everything written about the popess later, whether reproducing or adding, was extracted from this work, published between the

years 1265 and 1277 C.E. The popularity of Martinus Polonus's account is confirmed by the huge amount of surviving manuscript copies, about 425. In addition, the number of translations is great for that time, since the work was translated into Czech, French, German, Italian, Spanish and English (Rustici, 2006: 06). This short narrative served as inspiration for the humanist Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-75 C.E.), for the papal historian Bartolomeo Platina (1421-81 C.E.), for the Protestant John Bale (1495-1563 C.E.) and for so many others.

Martinus's narrative introduced the name of the Pope (John),⁶ the place of his birth (Mainz), the lover, the date of the pontificate (855 C.E.), the duration of the pontificate (two years, seven months and four days), the study place (Athens) and the site of the unexpected birth (in a narrow passage between the Colosseum and the church of St. Clement). The narrative is as follows:

"After Leo (i.e., Leo IV), John, an Englishman born in Mainz, occupied the papal throne for two years, seven months and four days. He died in Rome and the papacy was vacant for a month. He, as it is stated, was a woman, and when she was still young, she was taken to Athens, dressed as a man by a certain lover. She had progressed so far in the various branches of knowledge that no one was able to match her. She then taught in Rome and had great teachers as her students and auditors. In addition, because her life

⁶ Strangely, the author put the name of the popess in the masculine gender.

and her knowledge were esteemed in the City (Rome), she was unanimously elected pope. However, when she exercised her papacy, she became pregnant with her lover. Unaware of the moment of childbirth, as she was moving from Saint Peter's chapel to the Lateran, she gave birth in a narrow passageway between the Colosseum and the church of St. Clement, and after her death, as it is said, she was buried in the same place. Because the Pope avoids that street it is believed by many that he does so by virtue of the repugnance of that event. He is not included in the catalog of the holy pontiffs because of the deformity of the female as to this circumstance (that of governing as pope)" (Noble, 2013: 219, Latin text 219n5).

Firstly, note that, unlike previous authors' accounts, Martinus took turns using the male (he) and female (she) pronouns in his text. The popess is called *Iohannes* (John) instead of *Iohanna* (Joan).⁷ In addition, some phrases in passive voice indicate that he included in his record data extracted from the oral tradition, suggesting that, in addition to the few existing written records, there was a parallel oral transmission, passed from generation to generation. Phrases such as "as asserted" (*ut asseritur*) and "as it is said" (*ut dicitur*) wave to oral sources. An indication that the history of the popess had gained credibility at that time can be found in the phrase "it is believed by many" (*creditur a plerisque*). While, by the way, the phrase "by virtue of the female deformity" (*propter mulieris sexus quantum ad hoc deformitatem*) is

⁷ Names also spelled like *Johannes* and *Johanna* in Latin.

shocking to the idea of greater equality between the genders we have today. It seems that Martinus believed in Aristotelian conception that "the woman is a deformed man".⁸

The differences with earlier accounts are that Martinus did not mention the fact that the popess was dragged through the streets of Rome, and he did not mention the alliteration with the six "P"s. To Martinus' *Chronicon* manuscripts, something similar happens, that is, the popess career account is absent from the older versions, and yet, when it appears in later versions, it appears only at the margins of the page (Rustici, 2006: 07). For these reasons, the authors Rosemary Pardoe, Darroll Pardoe and Alain Boureau conclude that they are late interpolations. Reference to popess appears in a manuscript of the twelfth century C.E. (*Vaticanus Latinus* 3762) of *Liber Pontificalis* (Book of the Popes),⁹ a

⁸ In Antiquity and by the Middle Ages, the idea of woman's deformity and inferiority was common. Aristotle wrote in his work *Περὶ Ζῴων Γενέσεως* (*Peri Zoion Geneseos* - Latin: *De Generatione Animalium*) II.03: "The reason is that the woman is as if she were a deformed man" (Peck, 1943: 175). This phrase was influential in many theologians, including Thomas Aquinas.

⁹ The initial compiler of this work was *Anastasius Bibliothecarius* (dead in 886). He was contemporary with the popess Joan, if we can believe the date attributed to her by Martinus Polonus. He disputed the papal throne with Benedict III, managed to be elected pope. But was dethroned a few weeks later and Benedict III was elected pope in 855 C.E. (Kelly, 1988: 105), the year in which Martinus attributed the beginning of the pontificate of the popess Joan. Even so, *Anastasius* got the position of papal librarian and so he was commissioned to compile the biographies of the popes in the

collection of papal biographies compiled in ninth century C.E., and then increased in subsequent editions. However, the Joan entry, which matches the word-for-word *Chronicon* account, appears at the bottom of a page with a calligraphy that differs from that of the rest of the main text. In addition, what is also suspect, the account of the career of Pope Leo IV continues on next page, evidencing that it was really an interpolation (Rustici, 2006: 07-8; see also: Döllinger, 1872: 24-5).

The modern researchers (Morris, 1985: 71-2; Pardoe, 1988: 12-4 and Boureau, 2001: 116) conclude, therefore, that the popess account in the *Chronicon* was added in the manuscript sometime in century XIV and probably by the historian Landolfo Colonna (dead in 1331 C.E.), who had the text at that time. Hence, only twenty-six years after Martinus had composed *Chronicon*, the popess narrative came to be accepted as part of the text (Rustici, 2006: 08).

Over time, the text of Martinus Polonus became the canonical version of the history of the popess Joan. Thomas F. X. Noble pointed out: "Literally, countless later authors have simply appropriated the Martinus version of the history of the popess Joan. Ironically, when several authors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries C.E. compiled extensive lists of authors who confirmed the truth of the story, they failed to mention, or did

Liber Pontificalis. Therefore, some authors suspect that *Anastasius* was the inventor of the popess Joan's legend, out of resentment that he had been dethroned in order to demoralize the papacy, but the accusation of Anastasius as the inventor of the legend is only a conjecture.

not realize, that those authors were merely repeating, almost literally, the account of Martinus" (Noble, 2013: 219).

The Statue in Cathedral of Siena

Another example that the legend of the popess Joan was very popular during the Middle Ages is the existence of a statue of the popess, which was exposed in the Cathedral of Siena until the end of the sixteenth century C.E. That this statue existed and was exposed inside that church for some years is confirmed in some surviving documents. However, those who visit this cathedral today will be disappointed to find no more the statue of the popess, among the about 170 statues of popes that adorn the nave of the church, since it was transformed into the figure of Pope Zacharias, according to the request of the controversial French priest Florimond of Raemond (1540-1602 C.E.), who complained about the statue to Pope Clement VIII (pontificate of 1592-1605 C.E.). Then, the Grand Duke of Tuscany ordered the removal of the statue in 1600 C.E., however, instead of the simple removal; the statue was changed to represent the pope Zacharias by the local artisan and then returned to his place of origin. In his book *Erreur Populaire de la Papessa Jane* (last issue 1594 C.E.), Raemond argued that such a popess never existed and so he launched a campaign to remove the statue. (Rustici, 2006: 13).

The reaction of Florimond of Raemond reflects the change in vision about the historicity of the popess, which was emerging in the early

modern age, when some began to distrust truthfulness and to bring the matter to the fore.

Characters who Inspired the Creation of the Legend

Speculation about who inspired the creation of the legend has existed in great numbers since many centuries. Among the many suggestions, two are the most mentioned by historians: Pope John VIII, who occupied the papal throne from 872 to 882 C.E., a pope considered effeminate and Marozia (892-937 C.E.), along with his mother Theodora (died in 926 C.E.), acted as an effective feminine power behind the papal throne.

John VIII was not able to bravely face the patriarch of Constantinople *Photius* (810-95 C.E.), a candidate to patriarchy who had been excommunicated by an earlier pope and who had written an attack on the dogma of Rome as well as ecclesiastical policies. So he was considered an effeminate pope, hence the creation of the legend to mock the situation that he was almost like a woman in the papacy.

While Theodora and her daughter Marozia named and deposed popes through their power, for the pontiffs of that time were like puppets in their hands, in other words, the Popes wore their papal robes and sat on the throne, but the women ruled. The abuse and debauchery of these women were so great that this period was termed by the historians "prostitute government". Therefore, the creation of the legend happened to show how a woman would sit on the papal throne

and thereby mock the weakness of the popes (for details, see: Rustici, 2006: 02-5 and Noble, 2013: 219).

Facts that Contributed to Legend Consolidation

Of all, four are the most analyzed facts by the historians: A) the deviation of the papal entourage to avoid the place where the popess gave birth; B) The headstone with the six "P"s alliterates; C) the statue of the mother with the child in the place where the popess gave birth and D) the perforated chair used in the papal ceremony to confirm the presence of pope's testicles being crowned.

A). as for the deviation of the papal procession, at that time the Vatican did not exist, but the cathedral of Saint Peter already existed. The pope resided in the palace of Lateran and frequently made the journey between these two places. To carry out this journey, the papal procession would have to pass through the Colosseum and the basilica of St. Clement. These two buildings are connected by Via San Giovanni in Luteranno. In the Middle Ages, according to what is known, this street had a statue of a mother with a child. Then, since this street was very narrow, the papal procession was obliged to avoid it. Hence, many began to think that this was the place where the Pope Joan gave birth, so that the deviation happened because of the repugnance of the Pope for that event and that the statue was built to mark the place.¹⁰

¹⁰ The occurrence of the deviation is recorded in Adam of Usk's *Chronicon*, when he recounts a papal procession of coronation in 1404 c.e.: "Then, after (the procession) turn

That this deviation happened it is effectively confirmed in the account of a warning received by the Master of Papal Ceremonies, John Burchard (bishop of Strasbourg), who organized a procession for Pope Innocent VIII in 1486 C.E., in his book *Liber Nōtārum* (Book of Notes), for not having diverted the procession from that narrow street that housed the statue of the popess. The book recorded the following: "On his return, he (the pope) came by the way of the Colosseum and through that narrow street where the statue of the pope woman (*imago papissae*) is located, in memory of the event, it is said that John VII (or VIII) Angelicus gave birth to a child in that place. For this reason, many say that popes are not allowed to ride a horse there. That is why the Archbishop of Florence, the Bishop of Massano and Hugo de Bencii, the Apostolic Under-Dean, issued a reprimand for me. However, I spoke on this subject with the bishop of Pienza, who told me that it is foolish and heresy to think that popes are forbidden to go through that street, no authentic document or custom is known to forbid them to do so " (*Liber Nōtārum*, part I, vol 01, p 176, see also: Stanford, 1999: 104-5).

The historical explanation for this deviation is that the street that housed the statue was too narrow for a procession to cross it comfortably, so the diversion was necessary. Visitors who visit the site today will not find it as in the Middle Ages, since Pope Sixtus V (pontificate

aside, because of the repulsion of the popess Joan, whose image of stone with his son is located on the street next to the cathedral of Saint Clement ..." (Thompson, 1904: 263).

of 1585-90 C.E.) reformed and widened the street.¹¹

B). the inscription on the tombstone with the six "P"s alliterated in the tomb of the popess is not strictly coincidental in the first four accounts, especially the first word. In the account of Jean of Mailly, it is *Petre* (Peter), in the account of the Franciscan of Erfurt, it is *Papa* (Father), in Etiene of Bourbon is *Parce* (Avoid) and in Martinus Polonus, this phrase is omitted. The conclusion that can be drawn from this divergence is that none of these authors knew the tombstone personally; therefore, they must have extracted the information from the oral tradition. In the account of the *Chronica Minor* of the Franciscan of Erfurt, the phrase is not inscribed on a tombstone, but it was pronounced by a devil in order to denounce the farce of the popess. Also, in the accounts of Jean of Mailly and the Franciscan of Erfurt, the verb *prōdere* (publish) is in the imperative "*prōditō*" (publish), whereas in Etiene of Bourbon's account the verb is in the infinitive "*prōdere*".

C). As for the statue of the mother with the child, which many in Rome believed to represent the popess Joan, the earliest record is in *Mirabilia Urbis Romae* (Marvels of the City of Rome), the first edition published approximately in 1375 C.E.,¹² a book without author, without

¹¹ The popularity of this narrow street was so great in Rome at that time, that Via dei Querceti Street, which was avoided, later came to be called *Vicus Papissa*, that is, Popess Street (Noble, 2013: 219 and Stanford : 1999: 105).

¹² In the several editions, the popess statue is mentioned but in other issues, it is not mentioned. The curious thing is that in one of the editions it is mentioned that the corpse of the

pagination and that has undergone many changes in the subsequent editions. In this work, it is mentioned that the statue of the popess was located "near the Coliseum" (Stanford, 1999: 103). Another, more reliable, later record is in Adae Usk's *Chronicon*, 1377-1421 C.E. (Chronicle of Adam of Usk), where the author Adam of Usk, in reporting a papal procession for coronation, occurred in 1404 C.E., the location of the statue is mentioned: "Then, after turning aside, because of the repulsion of the popess Joan, whose stone image with her son is located in the street next to the cathedral of St. Clement ..." (Thompson, 1904: 263).

Later, much mentioned by historians was Martin Luther (1483-1546 C.E.), who visited Rome in his youth (probably in the year 1510 C.E.); he saw the statue and described it as "... A woman in Papal style robes holding a child and a scepter", but expressed surprise that the popes would allow that statue to remain there (Stanford, 1999: 104).

Everything indicates that such a statue really existed, but the discussion among the authors is whether that statue was really popess Joan's or represented another woman, perhaps a goddess of classical Greek religion. Giuseppe Tomassetti suggested that a statue, now displayed in the Chiaramonti Gallery of the Vatican Museum, represents the popess Joan and her son (Tomassetti, 1907: 82-95; see also: Noble, 2013: 219n26). Others understand that this statue in the museum represents the Roman goddess Juno

popess Joan was buried "among the virtuosos" in Saint Peter's Cathedral (Stanford, 1999: 103). This tomb was never found.

nursing Hercules as a child. While other authors claim that the statue was destroyed during the reform and enlargement of such narrow street (*Vicus Papissa*), work done by Pope Sixtus V, in the late sixteenth century E.C. (for further details, see: Döllinger, 1874:33)

D). The perforated chair, which actually there are two surviving, one is in the Vatican Museum and the other in the Louvre Museum, taken to Paris by Napoleon as a war spoil. The existence of these perforated chairs represents the most intriguing and most disturbing factor for the solution of the historicity or fictitiousness of the popess Joan. They are chairs with a round hole in the middle of the seat, something resembling a toilet. Proponents of historicity claim that they were used to check the next pope's testicles during the coronation ceremony, that is to say, whether the candidate was not a eunuch or a woman in disguise. A papal rite created after the popess scandal, proving that it really existed and ascended the pontifical throne. Records on the occurrence of this rite exist. Around 1290 C.E., the Dominican priest Robert d'Uzès reported in one of his visions: "Then the Spirit led me to the palace of the Lateran. In addition, there, he placed me on the porch, in front of the porphyric chair, where it is said that they verify if the pope is a man "(Noble, 2013: 219). In the following century, precisely in 1379 C.E., Johannes of Viktring, after a discussion on popess Joan, recorded: "To avoid such an error, as soon as the elect sits on Peter's throne, the youngest of the deans touches his genitals through a perforated chair for this purpose "(Idem, 219). In 1644 C.E., the Swedish traveler Lars

Banck claimed to have witnessed the rite of verification of the testicles at the coronation ceremony of Pope Innocent X (Idem, 219).

Those who claim that all this is a heap of misunderstandings try to explain the reasons for the confusion, but in the most contradictory ways among them, even among the authors of that time. For example, the Master of Papal Ceremonies, John Buchard, described the use of these porphyry chairs at the coronation ceremony of Pope Innocent VIII in 1484 C.E., as following "... the pope was led to the door of St Svlvester's chapel, near which were placed two plain porphvry seats, in the first of which, from the right of the door, the pope sat, as though lying down: and when he was thus seated, the prior of the Lateran gave into the pope's hand a rod in token of ruling and correction and the keys of the Basilica and the Lateran Palace, in token of the power of closing and opening, of binding and loosing". Of this description, it is possible to deduce that the perforated chairs of porphyry were not used for verifying the presence of the testicles of the candidate for the papacy, but they were part of the ceremonies of handing over the keys and the rod to the next pontiff. However, the intriguing is to know why these chairs were perforated.

In 1479 C.E., the then Prefect of the Papal Library, Bartolomeo Platina, justified the use of perforated chairs, excluding popular rumors that surrounded them: "... so that the crowned person may recognize that he is not divine, but human, and subject to the needs of nature, so it (the chair)

is called *sēdēs stercoraria*".¹³ In addition, he went on to say that during the rite the pope "had to defecate" (Noble, 2013: 219). Thomas F. X. Noble pointed out that in Bartolomeo Platina's account he confused the chairs, so if a cleric as close to the Pope as Platina, Perfect of the Papal Library, confused the chairs, imagine how much one of the population might have confused the chairs and invented the rumor.

The last pope who was crowned by this rite was Leo X in 1513 C.E., when his successor, Pope Adrian VI (pontificate of 1522-3 C.E.) abolished the rite. So, if the rite was abolished in 1522 C.E. (or 1523 C.E.), the Swedish traveler Lars Banck could not have seen this rite in 1644 C.E., during the coronation of Pope Innocent X. Hence, historians were intrigued, not knowing whom to trust, whether in the abolition of the rite by Hadrian VI in 1523 C.E., or whether the rite continued to be executed, and thus the testimony of L. Banck is true.

Conclusion

The records leave no room for the papacy of popess Joan. The date most followed by those who believe in its historicity, 855 C.E., the one mentioned by Martinus Polonus in his *Chronicon*, does not fit, as the chronicles record that Pope Leo IV died on July 17, 855 C.E., and was soon followed by Benedict III, on September

¹³ Literally: *sēdēs* = chair; *stercoraria* = excremental; therefore corresponds to what we call "toilet bowl".

29 of the same year (Platina, undated: 220-6; Mann, 1906: 258-328 and Kelly, 1988: 105), thus only slightly more than two months vacancy of the papacy, which is not enough for the duration of two years, seven months and four days of the pontificate of the popess Joan, as mentioned in the *Chronicon* of Martinus Polonus

That the account of Joan is a legend, is the conclusion sustained by most scholars today, however, as was mentioned at the beginning of this study, it is only possible to arrive at this conclusion through absolute confidence in the records preserved, especially that these documents reproduce the true papal history. In addition, what is important, that there was no campaign to hide the existence of the popess Joan; otherwise, much of what was preserved is suspect material

Now, by the way, a dispassionate reader, whose knowledge of the history of the popes is not derived exclusively from the sources of Catholic propaganda, may conclude in some way that the existence of a popess is no more absurd and more disgusting than the existence of the immoral and insane popes of the Middle Ages. For example, it would be preferable to have a popess at the top of the Church at that time than an insane Pope Stephen VI, who ordered the exhumation of the corpse of the former Pope, Formoso, in January 987 C.E., and dressed his body in decay with the papal costumes and promoted a judgment of his mortal remains, an event called by the historians "the Corpse Synod" (Kelly, 1988: 115-6), that is to say, the judgment of the deceased pope. Insanity

like this we find today only in comedy movies or in humor programs on TV.

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